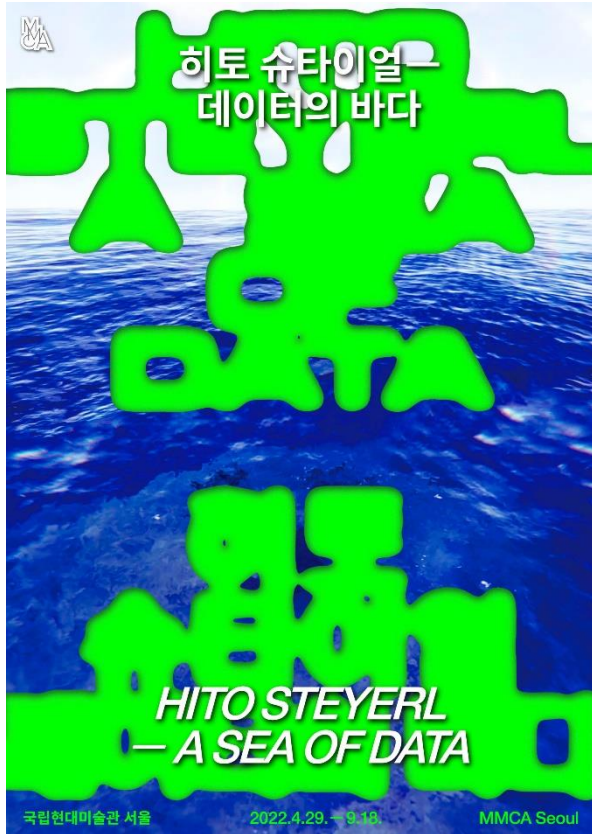**National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea**

Hito Steyerl–A Sea of Data

29 April – 18 September 2022

The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (**MMCA**, Director Youn Bummo) presents *Hito Steyerl–A Sea of Data*, the first large-scale solo exhibition in Asia by one of the most influential artists of the contemporary era, from Friday, April 29 to Sunday, September 18 at MMCA Seoul.

In the past, MMCA has shared many exhibitions that have introduced Korean viewers to the artistic visions of great contemporary artists. These have included Krzysztof Wodiczko in 2017, Jenny Holzer in 2019, and Ai Weiwei in 2021. For 2022, it turns its focus to **Hito Steyerl** (b. 1966), a globally active media artist, film director, and critic based in Germany and other countries in Europe. Since the 2000s, Steyerl has been drawing the attention of the international art world with her artwork and writing activities, which have shared philosophical and critical insights about the relationships of technology, capital, art, and society as they trace the hidden aspects of the digital society and the new grammar of images produced within it. Steyerl has held exhibitions at the Venice Biennale (in 2013, 2015, and 2019), the Documenta exhibition in Kassel (2007), and the Centre Pompidou (2021). The show at **MMCA** will be **her first large-scale solo exhibition in Asia**.

In her artwork and writings, Hito Steyerl has raised important points about media, images, and technology through her analysis of the ontology of the image amid the accelerating trends of global capitalism, the digital society and the post-internet era, and its political and social contexts. The exhibition title *A Sea of Data* comes from her essay "A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis-)Recognition" (2016), alluding to the exhibition's aim of directing a new perspective on a digitally based data society that has been transformed into a different reality today.

The exhibition features 23 representative works showing the full gamut of Steyerl's artistic vision, from early documentary-esque video works such as *Germany and Identity* (1994) and *The Empty Centre* (1998) to the more recent *SocialSim* (2020) and the **new MMCA-commissioned work *Animal Spirits***, which explore digital technologies such as algorithms, artificial intelligence, and robot engineering in relation to human beings and society.

The exhibition poses a number of other questions: Can technology rescue human beings from the maelstrom of disasters and wars that we currently face? What is the role of the contemporary art museum in an era defined by planetary civil war, rising inequality, and monopolistic digital technology? How have digital visual systems transformed our perceptions of human beings and society? How do the low–resolution digital images that the artist refers to with the term "poor image" relate to our ways of life? In the process, the exhibition seeks to provide an opportunity for broader consideration of and reflection on the new images, the visuality, the state of the world, and the status of the contemporary art museum brought about by digital culture in the context of accelerating digital capitalism and networked spaces.

To that end, the exhibition consists of five sections: "A Sea of Data," "How Not to Be Seen: Digital Visuality," "Technology, War and Museum," "Liquidity Inc. – Global Fluidity," and "Documentation and Fiction."

Part 1, titled "A Sea of Data," introduces major works by the artist that focus on issues of image production and circulation, data labor, and the current state of the contemporary art museum within a network society rooted in digital technology (data, AI, algorithms, and the metaverse). These include *Factory of the Sun* (2015), *The City of Broken Windows* (2018), *Mission Accomplished: BELANCIEGE* (2019), *This is the Future* (2019), *SocialSim* (2020), and *Animal Spirits* (2022). The new work *Animal Spirits* quotes the concept of John Maynard Keynes, the British economist who used the term "animal spirits" to refer to situations where human greed and fear cause markets to spiral out of control. It juxtaposes this idea with the ecological powers of Spanish shepherds centering around a cave showing wall paintings from the Paleolithic era, as it comments on the wild capitalist markets that have emerged today in areas such as bitcoin and non-fungible tokens (NFTs).

Part 2, titled "How Not to Be Seen: Digital Visuality," centers around Steyerl's representative work *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013), identifying particularities of the digital visual system as it raises questions about the hierarchy between the "seen" and "unseen" in a digital world of widespread surveillance cameras and mass collection and recording of data.

Part 3, titled "Technology, War and Museum," presents *The Tower* (2015) and *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016), works that raise questions about technological utopias and explore the hidden aspects of technology and war from a new perspective. Also featured are *Duty Free Art* (2015) and *Guards* (2012), which analyze the new role of the contemporary art museum as a place interacting with various social phenomena rather than as a sacred shrine.

Part 4, titled "Liquidity Inc. – Global Fluidity," presents *Liquidity Inc.* (2014) and *In Free Fall* (2010), works that express the "circulationism" of a global network era where all things circulate, including objects, people, capital, information, and data. Steyerl also applies the term "poor image" to redefine the new value of the image in the era of fluidity, urging a new perspective on art and the value of the contemporary image.

Part 5, titled "Documentation and Fiction," focuses on contexts of "documentation vs. fiction" and "truth vs. falsehood" as it presents the artist's early experiments with documentary film from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, in which she focused on issues of inequality and of racism and anti-Semitism in the wake of Germany's reunification. In the process, this section traces the origins of her documentary perspective today.

A **conversation with the artist** and **associated academic events** will also be taking place during the exhibition to promote a more in-depth understanding of Hito Steyerl's body of work. The conversation with the artist will be taking place at 2 pm on Friday, April 29, and expert talks and roundtables will be held between June and July.

An **associated film screening program** will be also provided as an opportunity to observe Steyerl's early works. Between Wednesday, May 27 and Sunday, July 17, MMCA Film & Video at MMCA Seoul will be showing seven early works that laid the groundwork of the artist's documentary perspective, including *Germany and Identity* (1994), *The Empty Centre* (1998), *Normality 1-X* (1999), *November* (2004), and *Lovely Andrea* (2007).

MMCA Director Youn Bummo said, "Taking place for the first time in Asia, *Hito Steyerl–A Sea of Data* is a monumental exhibition by Hito Steyerl, who is viewed as a pioneering artist in the genres of video and media." He added, "As an encounter with the outstanding work of an artist who has raised fascinating points about art, digital technology, and society, I hope that this can be a starting point for multiple discourses."

Notes to editors

For high-resolution images of the museum, please follow the link here.

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Hito Steyerl

Hito Steyerl. © photographer Leon Kahane. Provided by MMCA

Hito Steyerl is a visual artist, filmmaker, critic, writer and innovator of the essay documentary. Born in Munich, Germany, in 1966, she is involved in prolific filmmaking and writing work that occupies a highly discursive position between the fields of art, philosophy and politics, constituting a deep exploration of late capitalism's social, cultural and financial imaginaries. Her films and lectures have increasingly addressed the presentational context of art, while her writing has circulated widely through publication in both academic and art journals such as *e-flux journal*. She studied Documentary Film Directing at the Japan Institute of the Moving Image and at the HFF - University of Television and Film in Munich. In 1990–91, she was assistant director and technical coordinator in Wim Wenders's team. During her studies at the HFF, she also produced *Germany and Identity* (1994). She subsequently studied Philosophy at the Academy of the Arts in Vienna where she received her doctorate. She is Professor for Experimental Film and Video at the University of the Arts, Berlin, where she founded the Research Center for Proxy Politics together with Vera Tollmann and Boaz Levin. In 2017, she was named as the most influential figure in the contemporary art world on *Art Review* magazine's annual Power 100 ranking.

She has had solo exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris (2021); K21, Düsseldorf (2020); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Park Avenue Armory, New York; the Serpentine Galleries, London (2019); Kunstmuseum, Basel; Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2018); the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2017); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016); the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Artists Space, New York; the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia (2015); Van Abbemuseum, Eidenhoven, the Netherlands; ICA, London, UK; Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany (2014); the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2013); the Art Institute of Chicago; E-flux, New York (2012); Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK (2010); the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (2009); and Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2008).

Group exhibitions include *May You Live In Interesting Times*, 58th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2018); Castello di Rivoli (2017); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); the German Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; the Hannover Kunstverein, Hannover, Germany; CAC Vilnius, Vilnius, Lithuania (2015); *Cut to Swipe*, Museum of Modern Art, New York; *The Darknet*, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland; Bienal de la Imagen en Movimento, Goethe-Institut Buenos Aires, Argentina (2014); *The Way of the Shovel: Art as Archeology*, MCA Chicago; *Nine Artists*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Bergen Triennial, Bergen, Norway; Venice Biennale (2013); Taipei Biennial; Gwangju Biennale (2010); documenta 12, Kassel (2007) and Manifesta 5, San Sebastian (2004).

Selected essays published in various places are summarized in four books: *Die Farbe der Wahrheit* (*The Color of Truth*; Vienna: Turia Kant, 2008), *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), *Beyond Representation* (Berlin 2016), and *Duty Free Art - Art in the Age of Planetary Civil Wars* (London: Verso, 2017 / Zurich: Diaphanes, 2018).

In 2019, she received the Kathe Kollwitz Award from the Academy of Arts in Berlin. Her works are included in the public collections of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, MoMA, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate Modern, and the Centre Pompidou.

Steyerl lives and works in Berlin.

Exhibition Sections

1. A Sea of Data

All the information that we seek online these days and all the images we capture with our mobile phones and upload to social media are stored in the form of "big data" and analyzed and rearranged by algorithms, with results that have an enormous impact on all areas of our lives, including our society, economy, culture, and politics. This digitally based "data society" has only been accelerating lately as the pandemic has reduced our activities in the real world.

In her book *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (2017), Hito Steyerl explains that expressions of our lives today are reflected in data traces, which are managed, cultivated, and mined by information, life, and politics. She also notes how our perception of the world today depends less on eyesight than on our recognition of patterns in data interpretation and processing—like looking at the world through the lens of Google Maps. With her satirical reference to AI as "artificial stupidity," she urges us to reconsider the newly transformed digitally based world from a more reflective angle, rather than accepting it unconditionally. Additionally, she shares her critical views on the contemporary art museum and new forms of art that operate in simulated virtual spaces.

The first section of the exhibition, titled *A Sea of Data*, shares some of the major works in which Steyerl attempts to re–examine the data society, using data, AI, machine learning, and algorithms as structures for her work's form and content—including *Factory of the Sun* (2015*), The City of Broken Windows* (2018*), Mission Accomplished: BELANCIEGE* (2019), *This is the Future* (2019), *SocialSim* (2020), and the new work *Animal Spirits* (2022), which was commissioned by MMCA.

Hito Steyerl, *Animal Spirits***, 2022**
Single-channel HD video, color, sound, 24min. Live computer simulation, Duration variable.
Production: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA).
Image CC 4.0 Hito Steyerl. Image courtesy of the Artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

2. How Not to Be Seen: Digital Visuality

Can we remain unseen in a world based in digital technology? Can we ever fully hide in a digital world where surveillance cameras are all around and personal and private data are being constantly collected and recorded? Who can be considered "unseen" in a world controlled by big data and Big Brother? How do we perceive the world and people differently from before in an era where the world is surveyed from top to bottom through means such as Google Maps, satellites, surveillance cameras, drones, and aerial mapping? These are some of the questions that Hito Steyerl poses in her video installation work *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013).

In *How Not to Be Seen*, the artist explains how we can remain unseen and "disappear" as a way of resisting the data collection and visual monitoring that are so widespread in our societies today. In the digital visual field, visibility is determined by resolution. If something cannot be detected through resolution, it can remain unseen; if it is smaller than a pixel, it escapes the camera's gaze and does not appear in the visual field. Things also do not appear in the field of digital visibility if they are not processed by filters as "important data." What ultimately decides what is "seen" and "not seen" in digital environments is not vision but machinery.

Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013
Single-channel HD digital video, color, sound in architectural environment, 15 min. 52 sec.
Installation view of *Hito Steyerl–A Sea of Data*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), 2022.
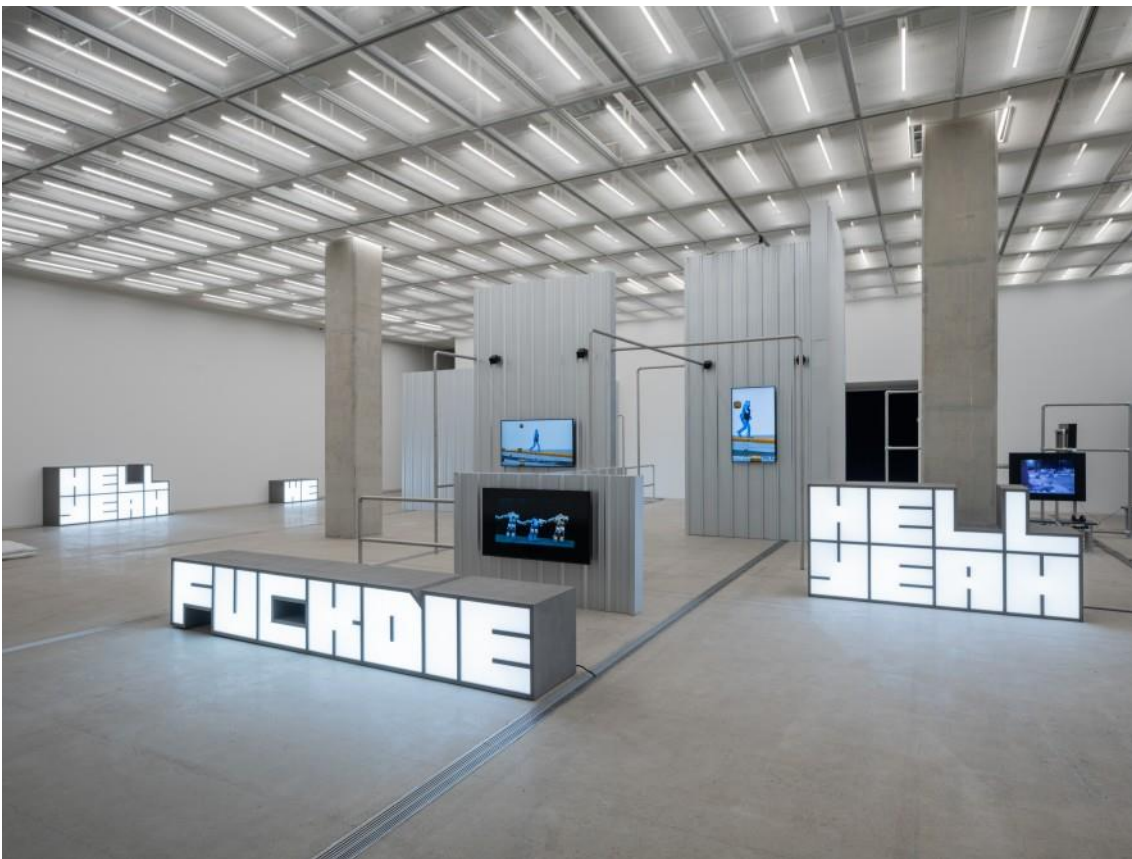Image courtesy of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA).
Photography by Hong Cheolki.
Courtesy of the Artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

3. Technology, War and Museum

Today's advanced digital technology includes such elements as artificial intelligence, algorithms, the Internet of Things, robot engineering, and 3D simulations—but does this technology serve human beings and enrich human lives? Can this kind of technology rescue human beings from the maelstrom of disasters and war that we face today? Noting our dependence on computer technology and the web, Hito Steyerl stresses how it also becomes built into us as we are monitored, regulated, and even exploited by it. In works such as *The Tower* (2015) and *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016), she raises questions about the "technology utopia" and alludes to the internal connection between technology and war as she re–examines the way in which the world has been reshaped through digital technology.

At the same time, Steyerl also bases artwork on the question, "Is the Museum a Battlefield?" Here, she mentions how museums have long been implicated in battles of unseen forces. She further raises serious questions about the role of the art museum in an era defined by planetary civil war, rising inequality, and monopolistic digital technology. In works such as *Duty Free Art* (2015) and *Guards* (2012), she encourages the viewer to perceive the institutions, distribution of capital, surveillance, and power that surround the art museum, casting a new gaze on the contemporary museum not as a sanctuary, but as a setting interconnected with various societal phenomena.

Hito Steyerl, *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, 2016, video installation, environment

Hell Yeah We Fuck Die, 2016
Three-channel HD video, color, sound, 4 min. 35 sec.
Robots Today, 2016
Single-channel HD video, color, sound, 8 min. 2 sec.
Installation view of *Hito Steyerl–A Sea of Data*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), 2022.
Image courtesy of National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA). Photography by Hong Cheolki.
Courtesy of the Artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin

4. Liquidity Inc. — Global Fluidity

We live today in an era where everything moves and circulates freely. Our age of worldwide networks and global capitalism is characterized by constant movement of people, capital, objects, and information. In the digital world, key information and value drifts about as images and data. Hito Steyerl uses the term "circulationism" to describe this new paradigm of free flowing and cycling in everything from countries to love, and from the public to the personal realm. This exhibition features the work *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), which features the lines, "I am liquidity incorporated... I run through your veins, your eyes, your touchscreens and portfolios." Here, she alludes to ways in which today's circulationism, which centers on "liquidity" and "fluidity," has reached beyond our bodies and physical environments to deeply permeate the data–based society that governs our day–to–day life.

This circulationism also offers a new perspective for understanding contemporary art and images. The artist employs the term "poor image" to redefine the image's new value in the liquidity age. The "poor image" that she refers to is a low–resolution image reproduced as part of a fluid process of endless transmitting, transferring, compressing, and reformatting. The images are the "wretched of the screen," but their more salient characteristics lie in their swift speed, proliferation, and circulation rather than their materiality. These characteristics also reflect aspects of our lives in the digital era.

Hito Steyerl, *Liquidity Inc.*, **2014**
Single-channel HD digital video, color, sound in architectural environment, 30min. 15sec. MMCA Collection.
Installation view of Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2019. Image courtesy of the Artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photography by Dean Tomlinson. © Art Gallery of Ontario.

5. Documentation and Fiction

In her essay "Thread–Spinning Women: Documentation and Fiction,"(2008) Hito Steyerl notes how even in the documentary genre, there is a constant mixing of composition and archive, fiction and reality, myth and creation. When we become aware of reality and start harboring questions about the given situation, this is based on fiction, she explains. The final section of this exhibition, titled "Documentation and Fiction," presents the artist's early experiments with documentary film within the contexts of record and fiction, reality and fabrication, over a period ranging from early 1990s to the early 2000s—including her first film *Germany and Identity* (1994) along with *The Empty Centre* (1998), *Babenhausen* (1997), *Normality 1–X* (1999) and *November* (2004). It also traces the origins of the documentary perspective that has become a central element in Steyerl's current work.

During this period, Hito Steyerl created her films through a participatory performativity, paying personal visits to construction sites, festivals, demonstrations, and cemeteries. Through her interviews, research, and archiving activities, she recorded and reinterpreted reality from the perspective of a historian or cultural critic. Her earliest works focused primarily on the experiences, memories, and voices of people who have disappeared in anonymity, including Jewish and Black people and migrants. In the process, she pinpoints the irrational historical moments in which fundamentalist mythologies based on ethnicity and religion—including anti–Semitism, colonialism, and racial discrimination—come to infiltrate the reality and eventually seize power.

Hito Steyerl *Germany and Identity*, 1994
16 mm film (shown as video), color, sound. 42 min.
Image CC 4.0 Hito Steyerl. Image Courtesy of the Artist.